

Children's Queered Voicings

Questions of (voiced) power

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PRELUDE: WHO'S IN CONTROL?

a

Inside the decagonal shape of Queen Victor the Fabulous's 'king' dom, Victor herself bends towards one of the swinging microphones and makes a dee-woop vocal sound overtop of a driving, part-funk bass and drum loop. Her sounds come back with the loop and repeat. She adds a couple of layers more, and the children catch on to the looping game. They start making sounds into their mics and hearing themselves come back on the same track. She rushes to the centre of the circular space, and, waving her magic wand, erases all the sounds. 'Now,' she says in her lush, charismatic and regal tones, 'would you like to try again?' The children scream 'yes'. She starts the recording process again. They make sound after sound, building the vocal loop up until no sign of the drum sound is left. A kind of cacophonous, dissonant chorus of impassioned nonsense pulses out of the sound system. 'Come, and dance!' she intones, commandingly. The children come to the centre of the space and dance – wildly, jumping and whooping. In 134 runs of this event in the touring show, the complete erasure and thus the disappearance of the backing beat track by layered vocal sound only failed to happen ten times. The children were commanded to dance to their own sonic 'chaos'.

b

We are at the installation *The Voice Trunk*. A huge, organic purple-blue, speckled shape, with copper and mesh extrusions, it invites children to speak into its twinkling microphones. Their vocal sound plays back, and they find out that we can shape it as it does so, by caressing and exploring the shiny bronze-orange touch surfaces. It has room for five to eight children to use it at the same time, inside an open-to-air, semi-private, acoustic pod. We had thought that children would tend to use it more when in family groups, as groups would

encourage one another to play and explore. We were wrong. In fact, we discovered that children visiting in school groups used it the most, with adults *not present*. As soon as a *familiar* adult walked in – a teacher, a parent, an authority figure – the play tended to become less excited and adrenalized; the range of sounds decreased; and interest tended to be lost by the children much faster. Play would then generally peter out.

c

During the R&D process for the live performance, a school class came to trial our show. These classes were always accompanied by teachers. One teacher's face looked absolutely stern and even deeply disapproving throughout the entire performance. I was curious about her views on the show. We were collecting feedback from all adults and children who came, with a view to improving the artwork. I was filled with certainty that she found the show at best appalling. In fact, she said, and I paraphrase her, she loved the show, and it felt so wonderful to give the children space where they could be loud and wild with their voices (this, we discovered, was common feedback from teachers: they were often approving and even relieved at the space we created for voice, rather than disapproving, which, frankly, surprised me). I raised, in a gentle sort of way, that her face seemed to appear very stern and possibly even, to my eyes, condemnatory, throughout. Ah, I paraphrase her saying, I have to look that way on these occasions, or the children get out of hand.

What do the preceding narratives suggest about children, the act of voicing, adults and power? This article explores our experience of developing, and then realizing, a series of voice-responsive artworks for children aged 6–11 and their adults, with a view to shedding light on the dynamics of power as they relate to children's voicing in art and in wider culture.

1 THE ART PROJECTS: RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND FEEDBACK

The *Your Vivacious Voice* project developed, and then brought to audiences, three interrelated artwork experiences. All of these intended to:

- elicit extra-normal voicing from children;
- celebrate this vocal material's creative potency by constructing it as aesthetically sophisticated and worthy of real artistic attention;
- stimulate reflection on aspects of voice and speech science, and questions of who gets to voice and how they get to voice, in both performance environments, and in our daily lives.

From this set of core intentions we developed three artworks. One was an interactive touring performance, called *Uluzuzulalia*, which was animated by two live actor-performers. The second was *Voice Bubbles* for iPad. The third was a performerless, sculptural, digitally animated installation, *The Voice Trunk*. The three art products were derived from the same fundamental research process straddling devising, conception and audience testing and interaction. To date, the artworks have reached in excess of 350,000 persons in varied ways.¹

My goal as artistic director was to make this work for and with the input of children, with an original age range of 5 to 12 years old and their accompanying adults: be these guardians, temporary or permanent, or teachers. Our creative team wanted to take advantage of the ever-expanding participatory turn in performance to make space for *audiences*, rather than just performers, to explore the territory of unusual voicing. Simultaneously, I had an ambition to make something different, challenging, unusual and with a celebratory, queer energy, for primary school aged child audiences. My practice's aesthetic languages straddle the sonic vocabularies of recent historical experimental music, some of the tropes and codes of the performance art canon, experimental theatre and a strange plundering quality that mixes highbrow, lowbrow and no-brow in a queered manner. I had been deeply saddened by the relative dearth of alternative approaches to the

making and programming of work for children in English touring theatres. The preponderance of adaptations of children's book titles, barely reconstructed (heterosexual, sexist, ethnocentric) fables and works that generally simply reiterated cultural mores and ideas of what children are supposed to like, seemed overwhelming. In most cases, the revolutions that live art, new dance and postdramatic aesthetics might have brought to work *for* (not so much *with*) children are notably absent from makers' discourse.

Yet I also wanted to ensure that we tested the work, collected feedback and opinion, and took into account the ways that our test audiences felt about the work within the devising process, rather than just how they appeared to behave or how they sounded. To that end, we used the pioneering methodologies of Matthew Reason (2010) to explore children's responses to the work, as described below. We combined this with taking more typical, formal feedback from adults, and with observation.

In line with Reason's (2010) assertions that asking children in this age group 'logical' questions about their performance experience tends to elicit extremely limited information from them, with the first 300 children in our test audiences, we asked them to draw pictures after their experiences, and then, with a light touch, sometimes discussed their drawings with them. Older children were asked to write down words, if they wanted to, beside any drawings. Sometimes we asked them to draw 'what they remembered', sometimes we asked them to draw 'what mattered to them' and sometimes we just asked them to draw any response of their choice. In addition, from about 120 adults – sometimes participating in, and sometimes observing the work – we collected written and verbal feedback.

2 EXTRA-NORMAL VOICING

The reader might not be familiar with the phrase 'extra-normal voice'. It was originally coined by music theorist Michael Edgerton (2004), who has written an extensive how-to manual on how to produce atypical vocal sound, which is aimed at (classical-genre) art singers. The term replaces 'extended voice'.

I prefer to use 'extra-normal' to help emphasize

¹ See www.yourvivaciousvoice.com for information about the artworks.

the fact that what constitutes unusual voicing in art is always culturally, and subculturally, relative, as well as time and place sensitive. Generally, extra-normal voicing includes sounds that are either considered unusually emotional, unusually expressive, unusually nonsensical or unusually intimate. This incorporates extra-cultural sounds (from languages and/or musical traditions the listener does not know), alinguistic sounds and/or what we might call, 'perceived identity non-conforming' sounds (which are difficult to label by age, gender or other characteristics). Many of these are sounds children like to make.

The term 'extra-normal' also intersects with the term 'queer' in productive ways. We might say that extra-normal voicing expresses a kind of queered vocal corporeality for anyone who does it. It does this in a transitory fashion, for one can usually return to a, well, 'normal' voicing pattern at will.

Extra-normal voice exaggerates and even makes virtuosity out of what Jarman (2011) calls the vocal 'flaw': the imperfection, or the moment, that reveals betrayals of technique or of vocal value systems. These 'flaws' become a core aesthetic material from which performance is made.

The aesthetic use by adults of such voicing is a countercultural, and sometimes political, project, for the adults making these sounds do so with technical prowess and out of volitional choice: the sounds are cultivated and purposeful.

But is it – and if it is, to what extent is it – really countercultural for children to extra-normally voice?

3 CHILDREN'S VOICES AS QUEER MATERIAL: STAGING CHILDREN AND THE VOCAL FLAW

Queer studies, grappling as it has with the results of enculturation for marginalized bodies and embodiments, has largely neglected the ways that *children's* bodies straddle the biological and the cultural and negotiate power structures. Children's life-acts take place in a space within which identity is being continually and actively negotiated through ongoing 'educative' processes: the induction and/or indoctrination of the living human entity into various cultural value

systems, identity attribution frameworks and bodily permissions systems, which affect the very neurobiological and neuromotor configuration of the self in an extraordinarily dynamic fashion, since the pace of biological change is dramatically enhanced by the maturation process. Within this, the role of vocalization is intriguing.

In some cultures, there is an obsessive hushing of, and in others a compulsive shaping through, the shaming of 'silly', 'loud', 'bothersome', 'noisy', 'disturbing', 'emotional' or 'nonsensical' child voicings into more acceptable vocal material. Then, of course, there is the shaping of the singing voice through various forms of music education. This obsessive shaping of children's vocal bodies marginalizes, indeed forces, their vocalities into the category of 'queer': they become extra-normal each time the wrong sound spills forth, especially if it spills forth unapologetically. Yet, unlike most adults, children seem to want to make an array of sounds that are not typically made in adult life.

4 WHO GETS TO VOICE? WHO GETS TO EXERCISE THE POWER TO MAKE VOCAL CONTACT WITH OTHER BODIES?

In my article 'Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres' (2010), I synthesize arguments towards understanding the voice as a kind of both literal and symbolic touch tool, and suggest that othered bodies listen out for othered sounds and tend towards them. Musicologist Nina Sun Eidsheim's recent work (2015) further suggests that we should reconsider sound as a kind of physical material, given that the vibratory waves from which it is made are dependent on material (gases, liquids, solids) for their transmission, given that it is through these vibrating materials acting on our bodies that we perceive that very sound. What Stephen Connor (2000) calls the vocal anatomy's exquisite sensitivity to the most minor corporeal and emotional changes means that minute changes in the body are reflected in the flux of the voice. The vocal sound with which we vibrate each other, the vibratory material with which we touch each other's tissues, is shaped in exquisitely individual ways, coloured and textured by the states through which our bodies transit, and by our phonatory apparatus.

So, voicing is not just making sound: it is also a kind of contact. And extra-normal voicing by children is a kind of reaching forth from a world where negotiation with voice–body enculturation is taking place at an extremely heightened intensity. Its contact is ‘weird’.

When we silence a child’s voicing, or shape it into a more ‘pleasing’ material sculpture – one which confronts us less – we are refusing or reshaping a kind of contact with a material field. We are refusing contact with the dissonant, ‘ugly’, wantonly ‘flawed’ touch qualities of the voices of those who would otherwise be educated into contacting us more ‘beautifully’. This former contact deserves space to be celebrated, rather than reshaped. When adults shut children up, they thus exercise the power not only to silence, but also they exercise the power to cut off a kind of vibratory contact with a queered corporeality.

5 LAYERS AND LAYERS AND LAYERS OF INTERSECTING POWER DYNAMICS SHAPING AN AESTHETIC RESULT

By now the shape of our political project with our child participant-audiences is clear to you. As artist, I heroically cast myself as a liberator of the oppressed and repressed qualities of children’s voicings that others silence and contain. I make space for these kinds of voices to flourish, and insist that they be allowed into the space within which we contact one another. However, we all know that the history of attempts to ‘emancipate’ populations is riddled with totalitarian gestures. The *Your Vivacious Voice* artworks alternately – depending on one’s perspective – overtly enticed, facilitated, permitted, coerced, demanded or commanded the production of extra-normal sound from our child audiences. To problematize the ways power functions in the artworks, I bring you inside four distinct thematic frameworks for thinking about the intersecting power dynamics vehiculated by them, namely: neurological predispositions; performer power; spatial design; and dramaturgical structure.

6 NEURODEVELOPMENTAL PREDISPOSITION AND OUR TRICKS: THE VOICE-EXPANDING MIRROR

Our process was informed by dialogue with scientific consultants. One of them, developmental psycholinguist Professor Catherine Best of the University of Western Sydney, gave us a key piece of advice. When reporting to her that children in our age group seemed willing to play at length with imitating or inventing phonetic chains, she replied, ‘Of course! That’s what children do. Children this age try to explore what they can do, with anything they do. They literally want to find out what they can do, which requires experimentation’ (2012, Prof. Catherine Best, pers. comm., November). What’s more, she continued, the psychology of speech and language acquisition evidences that until the age of twelve-ish, children are particularly driven to explore and acquire new sounds, for their brains and bodies are exceptionally attuned to picking up new languages, accents and dialects.

In addition to this, we found that if children in our age group made a vocal sound, and heard it come back to them slightly altered (for example, pitch-shifted, elongated, with a reverb tail or with other effects) they would often copy the altered sound with their own vocal tract, and do this repeatedly, creating a chain where their own embodied voices stretched further and further into the extra-normal through copying. We created events, interactions and coding that would do this. We call these devices incarnations of the ‘voice-expanding mirror’.

Thus, we took advantage of this ‘talent’ – let’s call it: involuntary agency – on the part of the children. They had what adults would call a compulsion to play with the sounds they made. Their involuntary ‘power’ was roped into the power framework of our attitudes, technologies and devices. We weren’t necessarily emancipating anyone or anything: we were merely feeding their developmental cravings with material.

7 PERFORMERS, PACE AND REFLECTION

The children’s participation in the live performance was highly directed. We arranged for a very specific set of activities to take place in a fixed order. The children weren’t given freedom to dwell, explore and play for the durations they wished. Lighting cues and sound cues hustled the performers/animators along, shuffling

them through a series of tasks that included: making emotional sounds, imitating specific animal recordings, developing a multi-tracked, vocal tornado, copying phonemes from various languages, touching the roofs of their mouths in different anatomical locations and seeing what vocal sounds these made, witnessing a video of vocal folds vibrating, exploring the way the breath works with their own lungs and musculature, among others, packed into an hour-long show. While there was some flexibility about the length of each sub-task, each 'room' the children visited lasted 27 minutes, with a maximum of seventeen audience members at a time in each room. In no way was the performance co-devised from a structural perspective. And the content itself, though improvised (and widely varied in actual sonic character) was contained and shaped by the tasks directed by the performers.

A significant percentage of the adults that fed back to us on our R&D process from the children's theatre/performance sector (about a third of our 120 adults) found the bossiness and the speed disturbing, and even too much like school. Those who did not find these elements disturbing often perceived the performance as if it were a 'workshop', not a 'performance'. Whatever the dramaturgical purpose of this speed, an appetite from the arts sector for 'space to reflect, space to contemplate' was expressed, with the sub-implication that we were misusing the performers' power to not allow it. This is, of course, one of the key critiques of participatory art practices generally: that somehow, audiences don't reflect, contemplate or digest the material adequately when their freedom to engage is limited. Numerous scholars argue for us to consider spectating as active, rather than passive: Matthew Reason himself argues for a model of understanding children-as-spectators as persons with agency (2010: 169–72); James Frieze's (2017) advocacy for a model of immersive performance that makes space for contemplation and reflection is impassioned. However, I didn't want to target this kind of reflection (in itself, a visual and literally narcissistic metaphor).

I traded the 'agency-to-contemplate' for another kind of agency. I tried to create a framework that avoided focus on an ocularcentric viewpoint. I refute the idea that

children do not reflect when they are actively doing something, especially actively voicing. Indeed, we might even think of these children doing directed, queered voicing as agents constructing knowledge-generation, contact and touch worlds that celebrate vocalic intersubjectivity. Adriana Cavarero (2005) asserts that the nature of vocality consists of processual exchanges of ever-morphing embodied subjectivities, and that this vocalic knowledge-generation – knowledge derived from relational experience – cannot be fixed, or objectively approached. Her concept of vocality, therefore, challenges our notions of the analysis of experience. I wanted our audiences to abandon the pressure to distance from their activity and thereby be completely immersed in the 'thoughtlessness' (embodied thought) of voicing queerly.

Both the installation and the iPad app allowed children to engage much more organically with the process and follow their own impulses to play, and incorporate temporal pauses where and when they wished. However, we never saw evidence that children tended to 'reflect' on their experience in a Cartesian fashion, the body stilled, the mind active, vision fixed, while interacting with these artworks.

8 DESIGN: THE PROPS OF (VOCAL) POWER AND CHILDREN

Put a microphone on a stand in the centre of a room – any room through which children in Western, post-industrialized societies walk. I guarantee you that within minutes, a cluster of children will approach it and make sound into it. This microphone must look pretty much like a standard, cabled pop star microphone: for example, like a classic Shure SM58. Beautiful, antique, recording studio or radio mics, as vintage and appealing as they might look, do not have the same effect. We can only surmise that the 'mic' shape children see pop stars use on television is pregnant with suggestions of power, pleasure and above all being heard.

In the 300 responses we asked children to draw as reactions to their trying out of the show during our R&D phase – pre-touring showings from which we gathered feedback – microphones appeared prominently in more than 50 per cent

of them. Amplification creates a huge vocal body, a vocal body that *must* be attended to. We had to 'restrain' and hide the microphones in our live performance, in order to ensure that the audience wouldn't just obsessively use them. The 'reveal' of the mics in and of itself gave us an enormous coercive power: vocal-sonic candy, ready for the taking, invited audience use.

Another visual aspect of the worlds we created appeared in 42 per cent of the drawings. Children were preoccupied with the cocoon-like setting of the live performance. They seemed, in particular, to remember and find significant the tent-like internal structures – the little 'dens' – in the walls of our circular and ovoid performance spaces, which they ran in and out of during the show. There were many reasons for deciding to make 'round', semi-immersive spaces for the children to inhabit: the lack of square edges and the contained intimacy helped to send simultaneous messages of 'freedom' and 'control'. 'This is an unusual space where unusual things happen!' ... And 'you are with us and cannot easily leave; you are nearby and are being carefully supported, but also monitored' ... Our surface treatments evoked tactility, through the use of contrasting visual and haptic textures, subtly reinforcing my view of the contact qualities of the voice, and perhaps foisting that view on the audience at close quarters. When we moved on to design and build the installation work, which had no performer, we did, in a classic sense, imagine the design performing the controlling role of *both* the performer and the design of the R&D and live performances. The space was even more contained, dimmer, and featured two window slits to allow some outer visual access. It was also acoustically insulated, though open to airflow, and thus the auditory image of intimacy and a sort of surveilled privacy was enhanced. All spaces were entered into through long and curving tunnels, with the exit 'disappearing' from the visual field as one enters. The sculptural object was fully touchable, and could even be climbed on with some effort without damaging the artwork. Hovering above this, voice-responsive illuminated textiles gave a sense that the interior of the pod was visually alive. The space, of course, performed the enticing, bossy and animatory role of the live performers.

The visual design language of the iPad app was also evocative of the haptic. As children made vocal sound into the iPad, a bubble grew. Concentric colour-bands responded to the pitching of the voicing on a microtonal level. As effects were applied, the shapes morphed and shifted, always with the illusion of 3-D texture, to represent the reshaping of the sound–touch qualities. In the three different modes of the app, users could let their bubbles of sound randomly play back (spinning on the screen); apply the aforementioned effects; or arrange the bubbles in a specific compositional play back order. The bubble's maximum length was 25 seconds. Enticing the users to be engrossed in the world of their voices by using design language, and to 'apply themselves' to extending their extra-normal vocality, was based in the voice-expanding mirror principle. The power politics of the iPad – its mesmerizing ability to neurologically occupy us – is observable, if little understood (except, perhaps, by Apple's corporate neurology team!). Its ability to engross, coupled with the dynamics reported in section 6, kept users 'inside' its world.

9 VOCAL-SOMATIC DRAMATURGIES AT PLAY

The dramaturgical shapes of all three experiences might seem very different to one another, and especially the live performance might well appear episodic and disjointed from the outside. What all three of the artworks have in common – whether directed by living humans or more open-ended in terms of choice of sequenced content – is that they told no 'stories'. Their narrative shapes were all designed, bearing in mind the nature of the 'voice-expanding mirror' described in section 6, to induce a participant to experience an interiorized, somatic story. We targeted an ever-increasing development of interest in, and increased sensory stimulation from, a continually expanding capacity to make unusual vocal sounds. All the artworks are incrementally educational in this sense. They all attempt to slowly, but surely, find ways to increase the range, breadth and adventurousness with which the extra-normal vocal content is produced. Through inducing heightened adrenaline, interest and, usually, also, affect, they intended to link a series

of 'positive' sensations with the act of producing this extra-normal vocal content. Through so doing, they might be seen to either 'give' the gift of, or 'controllingly induce', the association of vocal content that is usually discouraged or at least framed as nonsense, negative or noisy, with corporeal sensations that are akin to the celebratory: to the kinds of sensations we might get from dancing in a nightclub: where our bodies' gestures chorus in a united and disunited celebration of heightened indulgence in contact with our corporeality.

This incremental targeting of the development of interest in larger fields of sound possibilities, accompanied by the capacity to choose to emit these kinds of vocal sounds, and then see and hear them celebrated, might be perceived as an attempt to cultivate an ephemeral taste of a certain kind of unusual virtuosity in the children, and as well as an obligatory and manipulative imposition of technique. While children may well make such sounds routinely in play, the making of them will rarely be celebrated by (adult) performers, an art environment or an art object, and then purposefully cultivated. Thus, we use our knowledge (which is, of course, power) and other kinds of power to both entice and 'pull' children in the direction of doing what we want through building an internal, somatic narrative of ongoing expansion of vocal possibilities. And we use an adult participatory superstructure: a kind of teaching ruse, to take their somatic selves inside this doing of what we want.

10 PASSIVE EDUCATION AND THESE ARTWORKS

From a power perspective, what were we really doing for, with and to our audiences? The balance between the artist-team's control and the children's agency was not exactly hyper-liberatory for our child audiences in the sense of offering them clear, open and unlimited choice of action. Their choices were restricted in many ways; we used many different strategies to elicit the kinds of sounds we wanted to celebrate, and then celebrated them, on our terms. The children had freedom to develop content, but we were the ones targeting the *kind* of content we wanted. We were the ones finding ways to temporarily

glue the children to a place, time, experience and even the deep sensation of celebrating that content in the ways we saw fit. Of course, for many children the experience might well have been (temporarily) liberating, in the sense that they were channelled into sensations, affects and experiences that are not aesthetically celebrated in their day-to-day lives, and that are not necessarily treated as viable or acceptable social or artistic communication materials.

The artworks never claimed to be products of the applied theatre or community music traditions. However, if, as Helen Nicholson (2017: 106) points out, 'contemporary theatre-making is introducing registers of participation that resist the neat divisions of labour that were established in the twentieth century', what is the main thrust of, and result of, the labour to exert power that this series of artworks incarnates?

A useful framework from within which to examine this question is Emile Bojesen's construction of the notion of passive education. As Bojesen (2016) asserts, as soon as we use the term 'education', we think of formal processes: processes that are more volitional than terms like 'enculturation', and that take place in specific spaces and times within specific kinds of authority structures. He wonders whether targeting the accidental and the less consciously articulated processes of education might open up other kinds of learning and other kinds of relationships. Bojesen argues that a more emancipatory, less authority-driven educational framework might function like this:

[A] consciously passive education would be more attuned to the accidental imprint, the inspirational moment, the absence of (self-) certainty, the getting-carried-away by something outside of ourselves, without recourse to purpose, without the necessity of communicable and assessable reflection, without quantifiable linear progress or development. (2)

It is clear that many children experienced a form of 'inspiration' within the artworks, if we can take as evidence for this outward manifestations of excitement, interest and corporeal involvement. While we had a conscious purpose, they did not, and we did not reveal our conscious purposes to them; we especially did not target spaces of 'reflection' that were somatically quiet. Their experience with the installation and

iPad artworks might actually qualify for Bojesen's construction of passive education, since both (human) volition and the pushing of the children to articulate some kind of meaning from the artworks were absent (though environment and digitality were used to pull children into ways of voicing that we targeted). Thus, aspects of his model of passive education are a part of our artworks, but only a limited part.

More importantly, however, I would argue that in our culture, children are passively educated, in an ongoing, *non-emancipatory* way, from incredibly early ages, to shape their vocalizations in ways that the surrounding authority structures find normative. Repeated behaviours to silence children in informal ways leave imprints. This education is not necessarily in any way conscious, but it is passive in the sense that the adults invoking it are not necessarily aware of the consequences of the silencing they do. Therefore, our artworks serve to attempt to give our audiences a taste of an alternative value system, through borrowing from some aspects of passive education, while maintaining a control that is artistically motivated and highly directive. What we are really doing is using power to different ends, to induce passing, fleeting, somatic experiences of relative freedom to make often-silenced vocal sounds. We do this in order, to put it very simplistically, to give children experiences of an alternative way that adults might exert their power over children's vocalizations: a way that celebrates vocal sound, and vocal contact, that is queered. We leave this alternative, internally sensed, somatic experience in the realm of the supposedly 'unconscious' corporeality of the bio-cognitive process. It is only this experience that might leave some kind of imprint reinforcing that the 'weird' body – or at least the body expressive of usually silenced impulses – is *also* okay, liked and enjoyed by (some of) the world that controls children: that is to say, the adult world, the world of design, the digital world. We give them power structures within which impulses that are often shut up are celebrated, with alternative forms of power, if only for moments.

What seems clear, however, is that the sense of the 'liberation' of the queered vocal gesture for children is completely dependent on to what degree, and in what senses, vocal gesture

is already policed and restricted. The power to silence constructs the power to liberate silence; and with children, dependent on adults for so many aspects of their lives, permission (or *permission*, meaning to permit-sound) being granted is meaningful only because it is so often not granted. The celebration of the unusual gesture in the self is thus powerful. It is the sound of otherness, of what 'should not' be voiced, and I find it unutterably beautiful.

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